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Chairman: Mr. Acharya ..... (Nepal)
later: Mr. Andersson (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Sweden)

Contents

Agenda item 31: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 31: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(A/61/13, A/61/347, A/61/358, A/61/278 and A/61/172)

1. **Ms. Koning Abu Zayd** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), introducing the annual report of UNRWA (A/61/13), said that, in an effort to bring it in line with the budgeting and planning cycle, the report used the calendar year 2005 as its reporting period. It focused on outcomes reflecting the Agency's efforts to become more results-oriented. The Agency provided educational, health and social services to the Palestine refugees in five fields of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza. It also administered emergency programmes in times of acute crises. The education programme was the Agency's largest and provided elementary education and vocational training programmes. Despite funding difficulties, the Agency strove to achieve an optimum learning environment in and improve the quality of its schools. While the Agency's 125 health centres had been evaluated as cost-effective by the World Health Organization, the increase in chronic diseases that were expensive to treat indicated a growing need for care that was beyond the capabilities of the Agency. Its relief and social services programme had provided food, cash, one-time assistance and temporary jobs for refugees in 2005. The microfinance and microenterprise programme had provided nearly $16 million in loans in 2005, down from 2004 owing to the economic impact of armed conflict and the closure regime in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

2. The Syrian Government had facilitated the construction of 100 new housing units for refugees through the Neirab and Ein al-Tal project, including a water supply network. It had also provided refuge to a group of Palestinians fleeing persecution in Iraq. She encouraged other regional Governments to do the same for the Palestinians stranded at the Al-Tanf border between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Palestine refugees enjoyed a range of rights, privileges and freedoms in Jordan, which had extended collaboration to include improved sanitation, infrastructure and living conditions in the Talbiyeh and Baqa'a camps, and had signed an agreement to grant needy refugees improved access to affordable hospital services.

3. The Agency's staff in Lebanon had proved invaluable during the most recent conflict by maintaining health services, delivering food and other assistance to those unable to reach distribution centres and helping to house the displaced throughout the conflict. The intensity of the conflict had put the lives of humanitarian and relief workers at serious risk and Agency staff had performed admirably. Staff in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic had collaborated with other United Nations agencies to facilitate the evacuation of those fleeing the conflict and their return to Lebanon after the cessation of hostilities.

4. The conflict had aggravated the chronic poverty of the majority of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, as unexploded ordnance, such as anti-personnel cluster bombs, made it impossible for them to resume farming activities. The Agency was grateful to the Government of Lebanon for providing for refugee camp funding of $3 million in its early recovery plan, underlining the Government's commitment to ensuring that improvement of the refugees' living conditions became an integral part of the reconstruction of Lebanon. She welcomed the Lebanese Government's intention to grant Palestine refugees wider enjoyment of their rights. Her Agency looked forward to working with the Government to that end.

5. The Occupied Palestinian Territory had become a byword for violations of international law and the hardship and deprivation of the Palestine refugee experience. Since January 2006, the cumulative impact of the Israeli occupation of over 40 years had been further heightened by unprecedented levels of political crisis and internal armed conflict, coupled with a de facto sanctions regime against Palestinian residents. Between July and September 2006, Gaza had sustained 5,300 artillery shells and over 292 air strikes. In the same period, 298 Palestinians, including 49 children, had been killed in Gaza and 1,000 had been injured, many of them multiple amputees. Two Israelis had been killed and 28 had been injured from 424 home-made rockets fired into Israel. There was an apparent willingness to use more devastating methods of warfare regardless of their impact on civilian lives, while the restraining influences of international law were ignored by the combatants.

6. Living conditions had been in steep decline for six years, and material hardship had reached unprecedented levels. Recent surveys showed that nearly 87 per cent of Gaza and 56 per cent of West

Bank residents lived below the poverty line and could not support themselves without international assistance. Widespread unemployment had caused a dramatic increase in demand for the Agency's emergency relief services. Severe movement restrictions also adversely affected people. Indeed, West Bank commerce had been reduced to a trickle by the barrier around Jerusalem, the tri-sectioning of the West Bank and a draconian permit regime limiting the movement of people and goods. Internal checkpoints and fixed barriers in the West Bank had increased by 40 per cent in 12 months and travel to and from Jerusalem was nearly impossible for most Palestinians. As most of its staff in the occupied territory was Palestinian, the situation had a direct negative impact on the Agency's West Bank operations.

7. Settler violence had forced half the Palestinian population in the downtown area of Hebron to flee and settlement expansion continued through land expropriations, house demolitions and daily military incursions. The ongoing construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank was a concern, although its impact and the movement controls it implied for Palestinians seemed to be fading from international attention. Law and order was deteriorating, community cohesion was unravelling and the youth were increasingly radicalized. None of those trends were in the interest of the region or the international community. Nor were they compatible with the vision of a stable, prosperous and peaceful Palestinian State living in peace with its neighbours and taking its proper place in the community of nations.

8. On institutional matters, including management reform, a reinvigorated Advisory Commission, staff security and funding, the Agency had begun a long-term process of far-reaching reforms. The Advisory Commission had responded positively to an organizational development plan and the Agency was pleased with progress made in human resources management, programme development and streamlining of organizational processes. Management reforms were vital for UNRWA to improve its overall performance. In that context, the role and membership of the Advisory Commission had been enhanced and expanded. It now had 24 members and observers.

9. With regard to staff security, she noted that UNRWA Palestinian staff were the only United Nations employees in Israel and the Occupied Territory who did not receive hazard pay and reiterated her appeal on the need to address that anomalous situation. Staff security was also affected during the Lebanon conflict; since 2005 most international staff in the Gaza headquarters had been relocated to Amman and Jerusalem, prolonging administrative processes.

10. While UNRWA was grateful for the generosity of donor States, it was often compelled by inadequate funding to scale down its services; that in turn curtailed or denied the fundamental rights of refugees. The Agency was currently facing a deficit of some $107 million, since it had raised $138 million out of the $171 million needed for its 2006 revised emergency appeal. While the situation was dismal, the challenges were surmountable. Political will and willingness to compromise should be cultivated in order to achieve a peaceful resolution and a better future.

11. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran), noting that the separation wall was a sign of injustice and of the inactivity of the international community, wondered what its negative economic impact had been.

12. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the separation wall built by Israel had negative consequences, including creating more refugees, as noted by B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. That information increased the scientific value of the report, which did not discuss the wall's consequences in great detail.

13. **Ms. Abu Zayd** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), said that, while she had no figures on the negative economic impact of the wall, there were organizations that reported on them. UNRWA focused on the social effects of the wall, including family separations and unemployment. Landowners could not reach their land in the seam zone between the wall and the Green Line, and there were problems with respect to their land titles. The completion of the Jerusalem envelope had led to family separation, increased unemployment, inaccessibility of medical services and reduced access to education. The economic cost to the Agency was that it had had to establish mobile clinics in addition to primary care facilities.

14. **Mr. Gidor** (Israel) wondered why the report included information on 2006, when it covered calendar year 2005. If it covered 2006, it should include the Syrian assassination of the Lebanese Prime

Minister and the Islamic Republic of Iran's support of Hezbollah. Furthermore, the report covered all Palestinians, not only Palestinian refugees. The most effective contribution that the Agency could make to solving the crisis would be to stay within its mandate.

15. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the accusation that the Syrian Arab Republic had been involved in the assassination of Mr. Hariri was false. It was important to ask who benefited from that crime and whether in fact the Government of Israel had benefited from it. Furthermore, it seemed that the Israeli delegation was trying to politicize humanitarian questions.

16. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Israeli delegation was diverting attention from the main issues, including the catastrophe in the Middle East and the negative impact of the separation wall. That wall had affected the Palestinians economically and the Agency should step up efforts to support the Palestinians, with a view to helping them to become self-sufficient.

17. **Ms. Abu Zayd** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that the Advisory Commission had agreed to change the format of the report so that it covered the calendar year. However, during the presentation of that report it had also been necessary to refer to the serious events that had occurred in 2006. The Agency had avoided engaging in peacebuilding activities and had focused on its primary role of providing humanitarian support and presenting the facts to the political actors. More emergency work needed to be done owing to the economic decline; conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were worse than during the previous six years. The Agency urged all political actors to mobilize the political will to address that emergency situation.

18. **Mr. Sow** (Senegal), noting that the report was detailed and well researched, said that it was important to refer to the living conditions of Palestinians during the war and the social consequences of that war.

19. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon) said that Lebanon, which had been a victim of State terrorism because it had been occupied by Israel since 1978, condemned all forms of terrorism. Hezbollah did not exist before 1978, when the first Israeli invasion had occurred. Hezbollah did not exist before 1982, when the Israeli invasion had reached Beirut. Hezbollah was a popular reaction against the Israeli invasion. His delegation hoped that a constructive dialogue could be established in the future.

20. **Mr. Ali** (Sudan) said that the Agency deserved every support because it had been working in extremely difficult conditions.

21. **Ms. Enge** (Norway) introduced the report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/61/347) and highlighted some of the Working Group's concluding remarks, including its concern over the large funding gap for the UNRWA regular budget in 2006, its appeal to the international community to fully fund both the budget for the biennium 2006-2007 and the Agency's revised emergency appeal for 2006. The Working Group also called for the early and complete fulfilment of pledges and other commitments to the Agency, in particular the reimbursement of value-added tax by the Palestine Authority and port and related charges by the Israeli Government and expressed the hope that the international support for the Agency, embodied in the resolutions adopted each year by the General Assembly, would be translated into increased support to ensure the continuation of the Agency on a sound financial basis.

22. *Mr. Andersson (Sweden), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

23. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) said that the Agency's annual report served as a reminder of the harsh living conditions of the Palestine refugees and of the crucial need for the assistance provided by UNRWA. The Agency had defended the rights of the Palestine refugees who had been denied their natural and inherent right to return to their land. The General Assembly had affirmed the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homes in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948 and the international community had continuously reaffirmed that right since that date. The resolution of the plight of the refugees remained one of the highest priorities for Palestine. In addition to the collective right of the Palestine refugees to return to their land, it was also necessary to recall the individual right to private ownership, including of land. As documented in the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), the Palestine refugees were the owners of 5.5 million dunams of

land and that ownership must be recognized by the Government of Israel and be included in any fair settlement of the refugee problem. Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians had been displaced from their homes in 1967 and continued to endure difficult conditions. Their right to return had been affirmed by Security Council resolution 237 (1967) and had been annually reaffirmed by the international community. A mechanism for the return of those displaced persons had been established by means of the Declaration of Principles of 1993 but that mechanism had not been implemented and the Government of Israel continued to disregard United Nations resolutions.

24. During the reporting period, UNRWA had provided essential educational, health, relief and social services to Palestine refugees throughout Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Occupied Palestinian Territory and had continued to carry out its innovative micro-finance and enterprise programme. However, the grave deterioration of the political, socio-economic and security situation had adversely affected the already dire situation of the refugees and had affected the work of the Agency. The Government of Israel was responsible for that situation and must be held accountable for its actions. Hundreds of refugee families had suffered as a result of Israel's intensified military aggression. In addition to the escalation of the conflict, the situation of the refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had further deteriorated as a result of other Israeli practices, including severe restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons and goods under the closure regime, the suspension of international assistance, Israel's withholding of tax revenues and the continued construction of the wall. Those unlawful actions had devastated the Palestinian economy and had affected the functioning of Palestinian society in all areas. UNRWA had further expanded its emergency operations to respond to the increase in poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and instability.

25. The closures and restrictions imposed by the Government of Israel had seriously undermined the Agency's operations and that hindrance of the Agency's humanitarian work represented a blatant violation of international law. The international community must call on the Government of Israel to comply with legal obligations and immediately lift all restrictions on the movement of the Agency's staff, vehicles and supplies. In the context of those difficulties and challenges, the Agency had been resourceful and innovative and its operations support programme in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had been instrumental in facilitating the access of UNRWA staff and vehicles, in reporting on the humanitarian crisis and in providing a measure of protection to the Palestine refugees. He encouraged the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to continue their cooperation with the Agency and appreciated their efforts as members of the Advisory Commission and as host countries.

26. The organizational reform measures had modernized and strengthened the Agency's management and had enhanced its use of funding and its ability to effectively address the needs of the refugees. He commended the Agency's medium-term plan for 2005-2009 and its efforts to move towards needs-based planning, and urged all donors to increase their contributions and to respond to emergency appeals. Until a just and lasting solution was found to the Palestine refugee problem, the international community's unwavering support of the Agency was crucial for the welfare and stability of the refugees and the region as a whole.

27. **Mr. Almansoori** (United Arab Emirates) observed that the responsibilities of UNRWA had increased as the humanitarian, social and economic repercussions of the continuing Israeli occupation, military aggression, blockades and destruction in the Palestinian Territories had escalated. Yet, deplorably, Israel was putting obstacles in the way of the Agency's work, disrupting most of the programmes providing essential services to the Palestinian refugees, and seriously breaching its own international obligation to respect the privileges and immunities of United Nations staff in general and Agency staff in particular. The result was unemployment, poverty, illness and hunger among the refugees themselves.

28. It was the responsibility of the United Nations to find a just solution for the Palestinian refugees that included the voluntary right of return to their homelands and compensation for the material and moral damages they had endured. His Government called upon donor countries and the international financial institutions to give more generously to UNRWA to enable it to maintain and expand its humanitarian services. It also called upon Israel, the occupying Power, to stop attacking and blockading the

Palestinian refugee camps and hampering UNRWA and other United Nations agencies in their humanitarian work.

29. The Palestinian refugee problem could not be resolved without a comprehensive, just and lasting solution in the Middle East that included the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

30. **Mr. Adaileh** (Jordan), commending the outstanding work being done by UNRWA and the excellent report it had produced, observed that the massive presence of Palestinian refugees in camps in Jordanian territory had a major impact on the social, political and demographic conditions in his country. The Palestine refugee question demanded resolution, and it must be resolved on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international agreements, especially General Assembly resolution 194 (III) upholding the right of return and the right of compensation.

31. Despite its own annual budget deficits and its limited funds, Jordan spent US$ 460 million annually to provide educational, health and social services and security for the refugees living in 13 different camps in the country, and it sometimes contributed financially to UNRWA programmes when the Agency would otherwise not keep pace with the needs of the growing camp populations or when the Agency's funds did not suffice. It should be noted that UNRWA services in Jordan represented 20 per cent of its total budget, despite the fact that over 42 per cent of all Palestinian refugees lived in Jordan. In 1999 Jordan had adopted a national plan targeting the poor areas in its society, including the refugee camps, entailing a total expenditure of $50 million.

32. Any reduction in UNRWA services would be dangerous because they guaranteed a minimum decent living standard for Palestine refugees. The needs of all the refugees had to be addressed equitably, irrespective of their geographical location or living conditions.

33. Israel must facilitate the movement of UNRWA staff and vehicles in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, rather than, as the report indicated, severely hampering them, for that made the lives of the refugees more difficult and put a further burden on the Agency's already overstretched budget.

34. Jordan supported a one-time expansion in the membership of the Advisory Commission and believed that any application for membership in the expanded Commission should be examined on its merits.

35. Jordan paid tribute to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for her efforts to make the Agency more effective and improve the quality of its programmes, an objective sought by all Member States, especially the donor countries. It also hoped that the Agency's financial status would improve, allowing it to provide better services to the refugees who relied on them.

36. **Mr. Islam** (Bangladesh) expressed concern about the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Lebanon that had required an expansion of UNRWA emergency operations there and necessitated even more donor support. The imposition of sanctions following the election of the new Government in Palestine had only compounded the problem, and they should be lifted.

37. Israel's 2005 disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the circulation of persons permitted through one crossing point has indeed been a positive development, but the agreed goal remained unrestricted movement of goods, services and people to and from those areas, the only way in which their economy could be revived.

38. Israel's restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNRWA personnel and vehicles were particularly troubling and must be removed, for they were hampering the provision of basic humanitarian services to Palestine refugees, a situation exacerbated by the continued construction of the separation wall.

39. The Agency had taken laudable steps to cope with the evolving complexities by adopting its medium-term plan and a three-year blueprint for streamlining its operational management, in order to move towards needs-based strategic planning, effective monitoring and modernized programme cycle management, resource mobilization and public information.

40. Bangladesh would be happy to share its recognized expertise in microfinance and microenterprise with the Agency, which had begun using those tools to alleviate poverty and promote economic development, most successfully so far in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community must not allow the intrepid UNRWA

personnel to shoulder the burden alone as they worked in life-threatening conditions.

41. **Ms. Hernández Toledano** (Cuba) said that the continuing human rights violations and war crimes Israel was committing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had caused the situation there to deteriorate tragically. Its purported withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and dismantling of settlements had not ended its genocidal policies, for it was still in control of the Gaza airspace and borders, and it kept crossings closed to the population of Gaza. Israel's unilateral actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory threatened prospects for a negotiated two-State solution.

42. Extrajudicial executions, border closings, selective assassinations, arbitrary arrests, torture of detainees, destruction of homes and infrastructure, indiscriminate use of force and psychological terrorism had become standard operating procedures in Palestine, and must be condemned. The freezing of bank transactions by Israel and the major donors earlier in 2006 had, moreover, made it impossible for the Palestinian Authority to pay salaries and provide essential services.

43. It was in the midst of such bleak conditions that UNRWA had to do its work, providing essential emergency services despite unacceptable Israeli restrictions on its freedom of movement. Cuba commended the Agency for its budgetary and fiscal responsibility, but deplored its inability to use all the funds available for programmed activities because of security restrictions in Gaza and the West Bank. Israel must not be allowed to flout international conventions and agreements regarding the protection and security of UNRWA personnel.

44. Cuba continued to support a resumption of the peace process leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in the Middle East and ensuring the Palestinian people's right to an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

45. **Mr. Al-Otaibi** (Kuwait) said that UNRWA, which was doing its utmost to do whatever was needed, must be enabled by the international community to continue operating until the Palestine refugee question had been dealt with. The major financial difficulties it was facing were an added obstacle to its provision of services, without discrimination, in the five areas in which it operated.

46. UNRWA had provided welcome services in the fields of health and education to the Palestine refugees. Kuwait had itself offered material assistance to the refugees: it had helped fund many infrastructure projects conducted by other international agencies; and in the past year, because of its faith in the justice of the Palestinian cause, it had added an additional $1-million contribution to its $1.5-million voluntary contribution to the Agency's regular budget, in order to meet the humanitarian needs of the refugees and alleviate their suffering. Kuwait would stand by all its financial commitments.

47. Israel had long pursued its policy of domination by repeatedly invading the territory under the control of the Palestinian Authority, in total contradiction to the elementary principles of international affairs and in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It justified its actions by its need to protect its national security and end the violence against it, but its own actions only served to compound the violence.

48. It was a matter of great concern that the Israeli Government and its military were raising constant obstacles to the normal operation of UNRWA, which meant that needed services were not being provided to the Palestine refugees. Its staff were clearly entitled to the same privileges and immunities as were all other United Nations staff. The Agency, it should be noted, nevertheless continued to work indomitably under such difficult conditions.

49. The legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people must be respected, as required by United Nations resolutions. Israel had to respect the established framework, namely, the land-for-peace principle and the Quartet road map, that would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In the meantime, the Commissioner-General and the staff of UNRWA deserved gratitude as they assisted the Palestinian people until a final satisfactory solution was found.

50. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that 58 years after the worst catastrophe ever to beset the Middle East, there was not even a ray of hope that the suffering of the Palestinian people would soon end or that the Palestinian refugees would return to their homes as called for by General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Israel, in total disregard of international law and the International Bill of Human Rights, continued to prevent those refugees from returning to their cities

and villages and was bringing alien settlers to take over their homes. Currently, Palestine refugees numbered 5 million, the single largest group of refugees in the world.

51. Conditions for refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in Gaza, which had been turned into a killing field, had worsened after the recent Israeli attacks. Israel had detained members of both the democratically elected Palestinian Government and Parliament. Its claims that the unilateral withdrawal of settlers and troops had ended the occupation of Gaza were inaccurate. In fact, the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967 (A/61/470), found that the International Court of Justice, the Security Council and even the High Court of Israel itself had confirmed that the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained occupied.

52. Accordingly, Israeli actions in those Territories constituted war crimes under article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and article 85 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. Furthermore, Israel had violated the prohibition on collective punishment of an occupied people contained in article 33 of the Geneva Convention.

53. Even UNRWA had felt the effect of Israel's savage policies. The Israeli army had raided and bombarded the Agency's buildings and schools several times, killing nine students and injuring 20 others. Such actions constituted violations of the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, the 1967 exchange of letters between the Agency and the Government of Israel (the Comay-Michelmore Agreement) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. Israel had also refused to compensate UNRWA for damages.

54. Israeli disengagement from Gaza had not resulted in economic revitalization. In fact, it had merely increased the number of obstacles faced by Palestinians who used the commercial crossings in Gaza; there were now more than 400 checkpoints in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, territories with a combined surface area not greater than 5,000 square kilometres. Israel had made it difficult even for UNRWA employees to use the Erez and Rafah crossings.

55. The Syrian Arab Republic, which had made great financial sacrifices to provide assistance and support to the Palestinians who had taken refuge in its territory, held the view that the question of Palestine refugees was an international responsibility. It was important for UNRWA to continue operating until its mandate had been fulfilled. In that regard, he called on the international community to respond to the urgent appeals of the Commissioner-General.

56. It was a matter of serious concern that UNRWA staff, unlike all other United Nations staff in similar circumstances, did not receive hazard pay despite the fact that a number of them had been killed by occupation forces. Moreover, the Organization should hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable and legally liable for those heinous acts.

57. Fifty-seven years, nearly the entire existence of the United Nations, had gone by since the General Assembly adopted resolution 194 (III). Israel, through its aggressive and irresponsible actions and use of military force, had demonstrated beyond any doubt that it was still not ready for a just and comprehensive peace in the region. The time had come for the international community to put pressure on Israel to end its occupation of Arab lands and to implement internationally binding decisions and resolutions.

58. **Mr. Huimasalo** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey, and the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia, observed that UNRWA staff and management were performing their crucial work under especially difficult, often very dangerous, circumstances. The Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic should also be commended for having long provided assistance to Palestinian refugees. The European Union itself was the largest contributor to the Agency, providing more than half of its income.

59. The expanded Advisory Commission had made commendable efforts to help the Agency develop a better strategic response to the enormous challenges facing it, and the ongoing organizational development was a matter of great interest. The new reporting period the Agency had set would help it to devise more effective programming.

60. Over one quarter of the Palestine refugees resided in the Lebanese camps that had been most directly affected during the armed conflict of the past summer,

and even greater hardship had been caused by the influx of Lebanese civilians seeking refuge in large numbers. To all of them, nevertheless, the Agency had extended its help. The European Union was pleased to note that the Lebanese Government's recovery plan included the improvement of refugee living conditions under UNRWA projects as part of its reconstruction and rebuilding in southern Lebanon.

61. The deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and financial situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was a matter of serious concern. The closure system was a primary cause of the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where access to basic services was restricted, communities were divided and the viability of the economy was undermined. Israel must guarantee full freedom of movement and access, as it had agreed. Both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, moreover, must ensure that Palestinian refugee children received special protection. Israel was urged especially to guarantee full and secure access to the Occupied Territories for all diplomatic and humanitarian personnel and goods performing essential services, as required by international humanitarian law and by the road map.

62. The preponderance of residents in Gaza and the West Bank were unable to support themselves, and were totally dependent on outside international assistance. That made the Agency's role even more important during the current crisis. The European Union's Temporary International Mechanism (TIM) was bringing in badly needed donor support, and it encouraged other donors to make use of the Mechanism to help close the financing gap in the Agency's emergency programmes. Israel, moreover, should immediately resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues, preferably also via the Mechanism, to spur the Palestinian economy.

63. The European Union called on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets on Israeli territory. While recognizing Israel's right to protect its citizens against terrorist attacks, it was deeply concerned over the continued Israeli operations in the Palestinian Territories and the ensuing loss of life. It supported President Abbas and called on all Palestinian factions to join in his efforts to form a national unity government with a platform reflecting Quartet principles. There must be restraint on all sides.

64. Reversing policy, Israel should freeze all settlement activity and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, and should end land confiscation and the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land, all of which threatened to render the two-State solution physically impossible — a solution to which the European Union remained committed. It would not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties. The overriding goal must be to relaunch negotiations on the basis of the road map. The Palestine refugee issue could only be resolved as part of a permanent status agreement, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions. Until then, the services provided by UNRWA remained essential to ensure Palestine refugees in the Middle East a decent life.

65. **Mr. Kabtani** (Tunisia) expressed his country's gratitude to the UNRWA team for the efforts it was making under such difficult conditions to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestine refugees. The assistance being provided to the refugees by the countries hosting them, and the financial burden they were bearing, should be recognized, as should the donor contributions that allowed UNRWA to continue to operate.

66. The Agency's role was crucial, for the services it provided were basic. It was important for it to consolidate them to reflect the changing needs of the Palestine refugees until they were able to exercise their legitimate rights. Tunisia therefore called upon the international community, especially the donor countries, to support the growing numbers of refugees, especially as their living conditions deteriorated.

67. The grave situation of the Palestine refugees was directly related to the Israeli blockades, which were creating a humanitarian catastrophe in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and were having an adverse impact on UNRWA services. The report gave the facts of the Israeli occupation and Israel's targeting of UNRWA staff and facilities, which ran counter to international humanitarian law and to conventions signed by Israel. It was urgent to remove all restrictions on the travel of UNRWA staff and on its services to the refugees. Tunisia provided material support to the refugees, in view of their legitimate rights under resolution 194 (III) and in the interests of peace and security in the region.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.